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Which End-Game in Bosnia?

by Andrew Bair

Summary

- Between February and October 1994, the Contact Group (U.S., Russia, France, Britain, and Germany) made steady progress towards a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Bosnia. However, in November and December 1994, fighting in the Bihac "pocket" between Bosnian Government forces and Bosnian Serb forces threatened this progress.
- In response to fighting around Bihac, many in the U.S. Congress have endorsed a three-point plan calling for withdrawal of the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), lifting of the arms embargo, and "robust" air-strikes against Bosnian Serbs. Early withdrawal of UNPROFOR would prevent the Bosnian Serbs from holding UN troops hostage as protection against NATO air strikes.
- Most countries, including Britain and France, oppose lifting the arms embargo and conducting robust air strikes because they judge these actions, rather than contributing to a solution, will lead to a wider and more intense war in the Balkans.
- In late December 1994, former President Jimmy Carter met with warring factions to broker a cease-fire. The parties agreed to a 4-month cease-fire and are discussing the basis for negotiations on the Contact Group plan.
- The only solution to the conflict in Bosnia is a negotiated settlement. Efforts to end the conflict through military means could lead to a wider war and threaten larger U.S. interests in Europe.

Chief Policy Issues

The situation in the Bihac pocket has formed a watershed in the conflict in Bosnia. The clear and unrestrained disregard for UNPROFOR by local forces has caused many U.S. policy makers to question the viability and effectiveness of the UNPROFOR mission. Increasingly, there are demands in the U.S. Congress to shift from diplomacy to military action to achieve a solution to the conflict.

Three major policy options designed to compel the Bosnian Serbs to agree to a negotiated settlement are under review:

1. Using NATO Air-Power – More "robust" air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs to help protect the Muslim enclaves and defend UNPROFOR troops from Serb retaliation.

2. Lifting the Arms Embargo – Unilateral U.S. lifting of the arms embargo on the Bosnian Government to allow it to defend itself better against the Bosnian Serbs and to counter Serb military superiority.

3. Withdrawing UN Forces – Withdrawal of the UN force from Bosnia if UNPROFOR becomes

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incapable of conducting its mission or if UN troops are threatened with unacceptable casualties.

The contribution of the Contact Group towards a diplomatic solution remains a critical issue. Before February 1994, relatively little progress had been made towards a negotiated settlement in Bosnia. Since that time, the Contact Group has used its collective influence to pressure the parties to move forward in negotiations. The Bosnian Government and the Bosnian Croats have agreed to the Contact Group peace plan based on a 51-49% territorial split in their favor. However, the Bosnian Serbs, who control approximately 70% of the territory in Bosnia, have rejected any political settlement that ignores or reverses their military gains.

Potential Impact of These Options

Using NATO Air-Power

Under the auspices of Operation DENY FLIGHT, 12 NATO countries have provided air assets to support the UNPROFOR mission in Bosnia by:

- Enforcing compliance with the "No-Fly Zone," which bans the local parties from military flights in the airspace over Bosnia.
- Providing protective air cover to UN forces if their safety is threatened by the local parties.
- Conducting air strikes against targets threatening the security of the civilian populations in the UN safe areas.

Operation DENY FLIGHT has prevented militarily significant air operations by the warring factions and has responded to several requests by UN forces for close air support. The threat of NATO air strikes was effective in suspending the siege of Sarajevo for several months, and airpower helped protect Gorazde from Bosnian Serb attacks. Nevertheless, NATO airpower did not protect the Bihac Safe Area from Bosnian Serb invasion.

Several factors have complicated the use of NATO air-power against Bosnian Serb military targets.

1. Terrain and climate in Bosnia are not conducive to air operations, and it is not always possible to locate targets quickly and accurately.

2. NATO air forces operate under "dual-key" arrangements, which can be invoked only by a UN request.

3. Military effectiveness is constrained by the principle of proportionate response and the requirement to limit collateral damage.

4. Bosnian Serb forces have held UNPROFOR troops as hostages against possible air strikes.

5. Countries such as Britain and France have in general opposed air strikes and foreclosed their use in particular cases.

Proponents of NATO air strikes contend that loosening the restrictions on dual-key arrangements and pursuing militarily significant targets on a larger scale will more effectively protect the Safe Areas, degrade the ability of the Bosnian Serbs to prosecute the war, and deter additional attacks.

Opponents question the potential military effectiveness of NATO airpower if air strikes cannot reverse Bosnian Serb military gains. In addition, critics contend that more robust air strikes do not contribute to a negotiated settlement, because they intensify the conflict. Opponents also insist robust air-strikes could:

- Jeopardize the safety of UN forces, who could be subject to Bosnian Serb retaliation
- Hamper the delivery of humanitarian assistance
- Force national troop contributors to withdraw from the mission
- Invite a return of large-scale support by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the Bosnian Serbs
- Increase political divisions between the United States and its allies
- Aggravate relations between the United States and Russia

About the Author

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uation in the Balkans. Much of the information reflected in this analysis was gathered during a tour of the UNPROFOR mission in November 1994.

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Lifting the Arms Embargo

Under pressure from the U.S. Congress and the Bosnian Government, but against the protests of Britain, France, and Russia, the United States introduced a draft resolution into the UN Security Council calling for the lifting of the arms embargo on the Bosnian Government.

Those who advocate lifting the arms embargo maintain the embargo has disadvantaged the Bosnian Government against a more capable Serb force, thus unfairly preserving Serb military superiority. Moreover, the embargo denies Bosnia-Herzegovina, a UN member state, the right to self-defense as guaranteed under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Proponents also argue that arming the Bosnian Government will help the Bosnian army create a military stalemate, which could lead both sides to recognize the futility of continuing the war.

Those opposed to lifting the arms embargo contend the Bosnian Serbs would not wait for the Bosnian army to improve its military capability but would launch pre-emptive strikes against the enclaves and Sarajevo before Bosnian Government soldiers can be trained and supplied. In addition, opponents maintain that because the arms embargo has limited hostilities to localized areas, lifting it would only fuel a larger conflict. France and Britain have stated that if the embargo is lifted, their peacekeepers will withdraw. Since these forces constitute the core of the UNPROFOR coalition, critics claim the departure of French and British troops would jeopardize the viability of the mission.

In the event the embargo were lifted by the consent of the Security Council, other consequences might be:

- Cessation of current international peace-making efforts
- Substantial decrease in the delivery of humanitarian assistance
- De-stabilization of the situation in the UN Protected Areas in Croatia and perhaps in Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia
- Divisions among NATO allies on the character of future responses
- Increased tensions with Russia, who would likely increase political and military support for the Bosnian Serbs

If the United States lifts the embargo unilaterally, the Bosnian Government Army would expect the United States to defend the UN Safe Areas while the Bosnia army improved its military capability. Such an operation would require large-scale logistics support, take several months to achieve, and necessitate

sending U.S. advisers to Bosnia to help train the Bosnian army. Breaching the arms embargo in Bosnia might also threaten other international embargo measures, such as those in place in North Korea and Iraq.

Withdrawing UNPROFOR

Critics of UNPROFOR argue it has not been effective in keeping the peace, protecting civilians in the UN Safe Areas, and delivering humanitarian assistance. Many claim UNPROFOR has stood by helplessly while the local parties have engaged in "ethnic cleansing" and massive human rights abuses. In addition, the very presence of UN troops is cited as a liability, since the Bosnian Serbs have held UN soldiers hostage against the threat of NATO air strikes.

At its most fundamental level, however, UNPROFOR has been a stabilizing force in the former Yugoslavia. UNPROFOR's presence in Bosnia has limited conflict to a few localized areas and has inhibited pressures for military escalation. UNPROFOR has also been crucial to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and has provided the "breathing space" necessary to support international peace-making efforts.

The withdrawal of UNPROFOR would remove this stabilizing force and might also lead to the dissolution of the mission in Croatia and threaten the integrity of the mission in Macedonia. Moreover, humanitarian agencies would lose their protective escorts, and the aid mission could become moribund.

An orderly and permissive withdrawal of UN forces and their equipment would require at least several weeks under favorable weather conditions. Roads throughout Bosnia are mostly mountainous and in very poor repair. Only a few routes can accommodate large amounts of military equipment, and those are long and circuitous. Many of UNPROFOR's forces in Bosnia are deployed hundreds of kilometers from their initial points of entry at the port of Split or the airport in Zagreb. The airports in Sarajevo and Tuzla can accommodate transport aircraft, but are vulnerable to attack.

If UNPROFOR's departure were challenged and its withdrawal delayed, UNPROFOR might be forced to leave behind or destroy much of its equipment. UNPROFOR's withdrawal might be blocked by Bosnian soldiers and civilians who rely on UN assistance in protecting the Safe Areas. Or UN troops might be held hostage by Bosnian Serb forces in the expectation that NATO air strikes would follow the UN's withdrawal.

U.S. officials estimate that NATO might have to inject a U.S.-led coalition force as large as 50,000 to help protect UN troops in a non-permissive withdrawal. This force would require at least two

NATO divisions, including up to 25,000 U.S. troops. Under this scenario, the rules of engagement would have to be changed to allow more flexibility in the use of force against those who challenge the withdrawal.

There is the possibility that a number of Muslim nations contributing troops might elect to remain to assist the Bosnian Government's fight against the Serbs. Of the 25,000 UNPROFOR troops on the ground in Bosnia, more than 7,000 are from Muslim countries, including Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. The addition of these troops and their related weapons in support of Bosnian Government forces could result in a proxy war of Muslim nations in Bosnia.

International Peace-Making Efforts

Since February 1994, several steps have been made towards an end to the conflict in Bosnia. Until the Bihac region erupted in October 1994, a general cease-fire was holding, which gave humanitarian agencies the opportunity to provide much needed assistance to local populations. This cease-fire also gave the parties the opportunity to make progress towards a negotiated settlement.

Notwithstanding recent fighting in Bihac and restrictions on the freedom of movement of UN troops, the combined efforts of UNPROFOR and the Contact Group have helped:

- Provide support to the Bosnian Government and the Bosnian Croat Federation
- Increase humanitarian assistance throughout Bosnia, especially in the area comprising the Federation
- Limit hostilities to a few localized areas
- Formulate a peace plan and secured agreement by Bosnian Government and Bosnian Croat leaders

If implemented, the cease-fire agreement and confidence-building measures brokered by Jimmy Carter with the warring factions should contribute to stability in Bosnia and renew prospects for negotiations on the Contact Group plan.

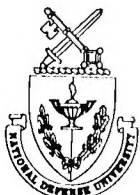
Concluding Observations

The "end-game" in Bosnia can still be a negotiated settlement of the conflict. It may take several years to achieve peace, and it will probably require a long-term commitment by the UN and its member states, but this outcome is far preferable to a wider war in the Balkans.

Even if the parties reach a negotiated solution to the current conflict, it is likely that there will be pressures for re-alignment in the future on territorial divisions, political arrangements, and economic relations. These pressures will be increased by residual ethnic tensions, regional military imbalances, and conflicting national alliances.

Policy Recommendations

- The United States should not seek to lift the arms embargo unilaterally, demand "robust" air strikes, nor push for the withdrawal of UNPROFOR.
- The United States should continue to press all parties to support the tenets of the Contact Group plan and to negotiate their remaining differences without interruption or further conflict until an agreement is reached on a peace plan.
- The United States and the members of the Contact Group should continue to use political, diplomatic, and economic leverage to persuade the local parties to reach a settlement.
- In the absence of a negotiated settlement, the United States should underscore its resolve and support for UNPROFOR's operations in Croatia and retain the U.S. preventive deployment mission in Macedonia to help contain the conflict.



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